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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1366
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4172
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1984
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1849
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2420
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0864
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2788
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001076

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EUR/CARC, EUR/RUS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: CITIZENS SIDE WITH RUSSIA ON
GEORGIAN CONFLICT; YOUTH JUST DON,T CARE

REF: A. ASHGABAT 1062

[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 1069

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The events in Georgia remain a hot topic of discussion for many Turkmen. The predominance of Russian media continues to color people's perception of the conflict.

And, not surprisingly, many locals take a decidedly pro-Russian stance. Unfortunately, some people turn to racial stereotyping as a way of explaining the cause of hostilities. There is a feeling, due to the influence of Russian news broadcasts, that some kind of Western involvement was partly responsible for the violence. Few believe a similar situation could happen here. The youth are largely apathetic and do not wish to understand the conflict.
END SUMMARY.

NTV OR NO TV

[1](#)3. (SBU) Many Turkmen actively discuss the situation in South Ossetia with family and friends. The vast majority of people get their information from Russian satellite news sources like NTV. A language barrier prevents most Turkmen from watching the also available western satellite news channels like Euronews, CNN, and BBC. Turkmen state media continues to publish only the barest minimum of information on the conflict, without taking a stance or providing analysis (reftels).

[1](#)4. (SBU) When asked their opinion on the conflict, Ashgabat residents with whom we spoke took a pro-Russian (nominally a "pro-Ossetian") viewpoint. Many see the Georgians as repressing a people who wish to be autonomous. One local said, "Why should Georgians be able to govern these people if they want to be free?"

UNION OF POST-SOVIET REPUBLICS?

[1](#)5. (SBU) Turkmen, particularly the older generation, feel a commonality with the Caucasus because of their mutual experience under socialism. A local mused, "I know Georgia

is far away ... but somehow, you still feel like these were your neighbors and fellow citizens once." Because of this solidarity, there is a lot of humanitarian concern for the loss of human life. Even those informed solely by Russian news sources still grieve over the killing and express a desire for the conflict to resolve quickly. "Innocent people are dying," lamented one local. "Does it really matter anymore who started the conflict?"

IT'S JUST THEIR "FIERY BLOOD"

¶6. (SBU) There are those that attribute the conflict to stereotypes such as the "fiery blood" of the Caucasian people. A local teacher explained that the Caucasians are naturally quick to anger. One embassy FSN remarked, "Georgia is a small country with centuries of intermixing between different cultures. There have been wars there for ages."

MANY POINT TO WESTERN MEDDLING

¶7. (SBU) Many interlocutors, influenced by Russian news broadcasts, seem to believe that Western military assistance to Georgia contributed in some way to the outbreak of violence. One local reflected, "I think the United States was involved in giving combat drills and weapons to the Georgians." An FSN said many of her friends believed Israel and even Ukraine are now getting involved as well. One local firmly believed that "this is not a war between Putin and Saakashvili but rather one between Putin and Bush."

IT COULDN'T HAPPEN HERE

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¶8. (SBU) Although Turkmen are concerned that the conflict is so close to home, few people seem to think a similar thing could occur here. "Turkmen are naturally a very peaceful people," one local opined.

AND THE YOUTH BURY THEIR HEADS IN THE SAND

¶9. (SBU) Turkmenistan's youth remain largely apathetic. Less than half of the young people seem to really keep up with foreign affairs. Even those who frequent the American Corners for Internet use frequently don't bother checking international news, preferring e-mail and entertainment sites. One 16 year-old FLEX finalist from Turkmenabat, when asked how she felt about the conflict in South Ossetia, replied "What conflict? I haven't heard anything about it. Is something wrong?"

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: The predominance of Russian media continues to color people's perception of the conflict. Unfortunately, some people turn to racial stereotyping as a way of explaining the cause of hostilities. Most frightening is the apathetic nature of Turkmenistan's youth, who are more concerned with finding work and going to discotheques than worrying about the outside world. END COMMENT.
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